

ECUMENICAL PRESS SERVICE

Published under the auspices of the: World Council of Churches · International Missionary Council
World Alliance of Young Men's Christian Associations · World Young Women's Christian Association
World's Student Christian Federation · World Council of Christian Education · United Bible Societies

EDITOR: JOHN GARRETT · 17 ROUTE DE MALAGNOU · GENEVA · SWITZERLAND
TEL. 36 71 30 · CABLES OIKOUMENE
U.S. ENQUIRIES: 156 FIFTH AVE., NEW YORK 10, N. Y., USA

No. 6/25th Year

February 14th, 1958

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WCC Executive Approves Meeting with Moscow Patriarchate

(London) - The Executive Committee of the World Council of Churches, meeting in London, agreed on February 11 to accept a suggestion made by the Moscow Patriarchate of the Russian Orthodox Church for a joint meeting between representatives of the WCC and the Patriarchate. The meeting will be held in August, 1958, at a place to be arranged.

The decision was taken after the Executive Committee had received a letter from the Metropolitan Nikolai of Krutitsky and Colomna, head of the office of external relations for the Moscow Patriarchate, which is not a member church of the WCC.

In accepting the date suggested by Metropolitan Nikolai, the Executive Committee acted on a previous decision of the larger Central Committee of the World Council of Churches, which had approved the conversations. The date originally suggested had been January, 1957, but talks to be held then in Paris were delayed at the request of the Moscow Patriarchate.

The Church of Moscow declined membership in the WCC, which now includes 169 churches in over 50 countries, when the Council was formed in 1948, but said at that time that the decision was "for the present".

Commenting on the decision to go ahead with the meeting, Dr. Franklin Clark Fry, Lutheran, USA, the chairman of the WCC's Central and Executive Committees, said: "It is assumed that this will be in the nature of a first exploratory consultation to exchange information and get acquainted. In the spirit of the ecumenical movement we have looked forward for two years to this new opportunity to discover ways in which fellowship in Christ may be assured by those who profess Him, albeit in the midst of drastically differing historical situations.

"We do not expect rapid progress," Dr. Fry continued. "Conversations will be cumbersome because they will have to be conducted entirely through interpreters. Moreover, the Russian Orthodox Church has not previously had association with the ecumenical movement."

Dr. Fry said formal negotiations were not anticipated. "The broad lines of conversations will be concerned with the ways in which the churches, by their faith in Christ, can cooperate and help one another more effectively to witness to Him and to serve freedom, justice and peace in the world," the Executive's chairman declared.

Dr. W.A. Visser 't Hooft, general secretary of the World Council of Churches, reviewed the work of the Council during the last six months at the opening session of the Executive Committee, which met from February 10 - 14.

Looking at "main points where the ecumenical movement has been active", Dr. Visser 't Hooft reported on the Faith and Order Conference held at Oberlin, Ohio, USA, last September; the development of the East Asia Christian Conference and the recent All Africa Church Conference in Nigeria.

Turning to what he described as the "most difficult problem of the last few months - the relations with churches in Eastern Germany", Dr. Visser 't Hooft told the committee that the situation in Eastern Germany is "very discouraging". The general secretary cited as examples two recent refusals by the East German Republic to grant visas to churchmen. The German Northern Countries Conference in Sweden was cancelled when East German churchmen could not get visas to attend. Earlier, Dr. Gerhard Brennecke, director of the Berlin Missionary Society, was refused a visa to attend the International Missionary Council Conference in Ghana.

"It is of the greatest importance to maintain relations with churches in Eastern Europe," Dr. Visser 't Hooft said, but added that it is getting "more and more difficult" because of pressure on the churches, citing the displacement of Hungarian Lutheran Bishop Lajos Ordass as primate of his church.

Bishop Ordass has been succeeded by reinstated Bishop Lajos Vetö.

The WCC's Executive was given a reception at Lambeth Palace, London, by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Geoffrey Fisher, who is a member of the Council's Central Committee and was one of its presidents from 1948 to 1954.

E.P.S., Geneva

Scandinavian Primates Ask Hungarian Government to Give Church Freedom

(Geneva) - The presiding Lutheran bishops in four Scandinavian countries have made public the text of a letter they sent on January 14 to Dr. Janos Horvath, president of the Hungarian government's Office for Church Affairs, in which they express concern about changes in church leadership under government pressure, and ask for the spiritual freedom of the churches to be upheld.

The letter is signed by Archbishop Yngve Brilioth of the Church of Sweden, Bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard of the Church of Denmark (Copenhagen), Archbishop Ilmari Salomies of the Church of Finland and Bishop Johannes Smemo of the Church of Norway (Oslo).

The message expresses appreciation of the Hungarian Lutheran Church's re-election of Bishop Lajos Ordass and Bishop Zoltan Turoczy since 1956, and says the churches of the Scandinavian countries had "noted with pleasure" the fact that the Hungarian government had enhanced its reputation by being ready to uphold religious liberty in this way.

Going on to point out that they have felt "exceedingly upset and disturbed" by the news that Bishop Ordass had lost his position as leading bishop and Bishop Turoczy had been "removed from his position, although acknowledged by the government at his official installation", the four church leaders say they hope these and other reports are exaggerated.

"Knowing your earlier efforts to try to maintain religious freedom in Hungary," the letter continues, "not least in the case of the Lutheran Church, we ask you to do all in your power to permit the church to enjoy unlimited spiritual liberty in the future also".

Answering the possible objection that their letter might be considered as interference in Hungarian internal affairs, the signatories emphasize that the evangelical churches have a feeling of responsibility for each other regardless of national boundaries, and point out that they "cannot be indifferent when the right of our sister church to conduct its own spiritual affairs and organisation is being held in question". E.P.S., Geneva

Archbishop de Blank Favours End to School Apartheid

(Cape Town) - Dr. Joost de Blank, Anglican Archbishop of Cape Town, has pledged himself to work for desegregation in Anglican schools in South Africa if "legal barriers are repealed".

He was replying to Mr. Eric H. Louw, South Africa's External Affairs minister, who had challenged him to eliminate apartheid in the schools (see EPS No. 5).

"I pledge myself to use my influence to find a way by which people of all races can come together in our schools and other cultural institutions," the Archbishop said. He cited the Bantu Education Act and Group Areas Act as standing in the way of the change, and said Anglican schools had admitted non-white pupils in the past, but were now prevented from doing so by the law.

Opening the second day of an auction sale in aid of the Treason Trial Defence Fund in Cape Town, the archbishop claimed that "any difficulties that arise between the Church and politicians come when the politicians become law-givers. Their political functions are to make laws under God's laws. They cannot make their own and claim they are God's," he said.

The ninety-five people appearing before the Johannesburg inquiry into alleged treasonable activity have been committed for trial on charges of high treason. All will plead not guilty, and have asked for trial with jury before the Supreme Court. An appeal for £150,000 to assist financially in their defence has so far realised £35,000 in the United Kingdom. Part of the fund will be used to help financially distressed relatives of the accused.

The Archbishop of Cape Town has come under further criticism in the South African parliament. A government (Nationalist) member, Mr. P.J. Coetzee, said South Africa had "had its fill of de Blanks, Reeves and Huddlestons, and I feel the time has perhaps come when General Smuts' policy of 'shoot first and ask questions afterwards' should be applied - that people of this type, including the new archbishop, should be deported".

Anglican Bishop Ambrose Reeves of Johannesburg and Father Trevor Huddleston, formerly of the Anglican Community of the Resurrection within his diocese, are active critics of South Africa's apartheid policy.

Mr. Eric Louw, External Affairs minister, speaking in Parliament, described Dr. de Blank as "a good recruiting agent for the Left-wingers who have inspired a world-wide campaign against South Africa".

The leader of the United Party opposition, Sir de Villiers Graaf, announced his party's continued support for school apartheid, but deplored the increasing heat of exchanges between the archbishop and the government. "A revival of the age-old struggle between the Church and state would be most unwise", he declared. E.P.S., Geneva

Government Reports on Destruction of India Christian Centre

(Bhopal, India) - An Indian mob's destruction of a \$100,000 Protestant community centre in Raipur last August (see EPS No. 35, 1957) did not involve "communal or religious bias", according to an official report released by the Madhya Pradesh government in the state capital of Bhopal.

The evidence, according to the report, "shows the popular outburst was only against the Gass Memorial Centre and the Rev. Gurbachan Singh (the centre's superintendent) and not against the Christians and Christian missionaries as such".

The incident took place when a mob of 10,000 persons marched on the three-storey centre after Mr. Singh had asked that a Hindu idol should not be used in a play being produced by a group using the centre. Before police dispersed the crowd it had set fire to the centre, smashed doors and windows, desecrated the chapel and stolen or destroyed equipment and supplies. The home was a project of the Board of Missions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church in the United States.

The 34-page report was written by Justice G.P. Bhutt, who was asked by the state government to conduct an inquiry into the incident. Minimizing the significance of any inter-religious friction in the episode, Justice Bhutt said that Mr. Singh and other missionaries had been asked to leave Raipur by the authorities "only by way of caution and not as the result of any actual trend of events".

Two leading English-language newspapers in India have questioned Justice Bhutt's report. The Statesman, a national daily published in Calcutta, says that a "worrying aspect" of the incident is "whether the admittedly wanton destruction of the centre was invited by feelings of religious intolerance out of place in a secular state. It is necessary to be particularly careful not to encourage intolerance, perhaps especially if cloaked by appeals to religion."

The Hitavada, a regional paper in Nagpur, said that the mob taking part in the demonstration "behaved shabbily and in a manner which is unworthy of the Indian constitution ... Mr. Bhutt is not on sure ground when he does not find a word of criticism of the police's action in their failure to protect the Gass Memorial Centre." E.P.S., Geneva

National Lutheran Council in US Seeks Wider Lutheran Cooperation

(Atlantic City, New Jersey) - The National Lutheran Council in the USA has proposed a meeting of its executive committee with representatives of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod and other Lutheran bodies outside its membership.

The aim of the meeting, which would have to be approved by the NLC's eight-member bodies, would be to discuss fuller cooperation among America's Lutherans and between Lutherans and other Christians.

Speaking in favour of the proposal, Dr. Paul C. Empie, executive director of the NLC, said that practical cooperation in the modern world without compromise of doctrinal principles was not only possible but imperative. He told delegates to the NLC's meeting that churches "must manifest at every possible place the degree of unity which does exist".

Eight Lutheran bodies, of which the Missouri Synod is the largest, do not at present take part in most of the work of the National Lutheran Council.

Earlier in the meeting, the NLC's president, Dr. F.E. Reinartz, who is also secretary of the two million-member United Lutheran Church in America, made a plea for abandonment of existing plans for church union between the Council's member churches. He urged that the union be postponed until all the NLC's members could agree to unite, and affirmed that all eight "under God can and now ought to come into organic union".

Two separate plans for mergers are at present in preparation within the membership of the National Lutheran Council.

E.P.S., Geneva

Denominationalism Must End in Missions, US Church Official Says

(Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania) - An ideal picture of Christian mission work that would end denominationalism in overseas areas was drawn by Dr. Alford Carleton, executive vice-president of the American Board of Commissioners for Foreign Missions, to 600 officials of mission boards and agencies of the Congregational Christian Churches at a recent meeting at Buck Hill Falls, Pennsylvania.

An agency that would be able to meet world needs would be "truly ecumenical", Dr. Carleton said. "Denominational and national loyalties would be reduced to the minimum necessary to maintain contact with existing churches, and there would be further separation of Christianity from Western cultural forms with which it has been associated through much of its history."

"There would be no more talk," he said, "of older and younger churches, nor of sending and receiving churches, but the entire effort would be to build a Christian strategy for the world on the basis of equality."

At the same time, Dr. Carleton said that there should be more stress on "technical competence and high professional skill" among mission workers. "The conduct of ecumenical affairs in a world like the present is a highly technical operation... It is a time when we can be satisfied with nothing less than a total mission of the total church to the whole of life in the whole of the world."

E.P.S., Geneva

In brief

Figures released in Washington, D.C., show that the member bodies of the Baptist World Alliance in 105 countries have gained over a million new members in the year 1955-56.

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Church World Service USA, relief arm of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the USA, aims to raise \$10,428,000 through this year's tenth annual united appeal of Protestant and Eastern Orthodox churches in America for overseas relief and rehabilitation. Sunday, March 16, has been announced as the date of the nation-wide "One Great Hour of Sharing" appeal.

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The first Finnish Orthodox congregation on Swedish soil has been established in the industrial town of Borås by about two thousand Orthodox refugees from Russian Karelia. The parish will be within the jurisdiction of Finnish Orthodox Archbishop Herman of Helsinki.

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Monseigneur Georges Chevrot, Roman Catholic parish priest at the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Paris, and for many years a leading figure in the ecumenical dialogue between Roman Catholics and Protestants in France, has died in Paris, aged 68.

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The Council of Churches in Indonesia has published in its regular bulletin extracts from statements on the Church and political issues, made in 1937 by the Oxford world conference on "Church, Community and State" and by the inaugural assembly of the World Council of Churches at Amsterdam in 1948. The documents are meant to give guidance in the disturbed state of Indonesia.

* *

Dean James A. Pike, of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine in New York, has been elected to succeed Bishop Karl Block in the Protestant Episcopal (Anglican) diocese of California, USA. Dean Pike, a well-known writer and broadcaster, will become bishop of the California diocese in December 1958 if his election is confirmed by a majority of bishops and standing committees of the Protestant Episcopal Church.

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The church building of St. Catherine in Lübeck, West Germany, is open for celebration of worship according to the rites of four Christian traditions: the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Lübeck, Roman Catholic, Greek Orthodox and Old Lutheran.

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Gustav Nyström, former missionary of the Swedish Missionary Covenant Church in China and Hong Kong, has died in Stockholm, aged 59. Widely known as author and musician, Gustav Nyström acted as interpreter during the visit of UN secretary general Dag Hammarskjöld to China in 1955, and again for Bishop Rajah Manikam, then East Asia secretary of the World Council of Churches and International Missionary Council, in 1956.

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A bookshop, operated by the Samoan church, has been opened for the first time on the small island of Tutuila, one of the Samoan islands of the Pacific. The shop is equipped with a grant from the United Society for Christian Literature.

E.P.S., Geneva

A Special ReportGerman Lutheran Churches Take Up Position on Apostolic Succession

The Ecumenical Committee of the United Lutheran Church in Germany (VELKD) recently presented a "Positive Statement" on the question of apostolic succession in the Church to the leaders of their church's synod.

Apostolic succession is positively described as "an essential dimension of the Church", which consists in keeping the work of its servants and congregations in harmony with tradition and with the apostolic pattern.

The document was prepared at the request of the Church government as a result of recent developments in the ecumenical movement as a whole. The "younger churches" of Asia and Africa are said to be asking about the theological significance of the idea of apostolic succession and the role of the bishop in the life of the Church. The statement also refers to current ecumenical discussions about the catholicity of the Church and the ministry, to "high church" movements within Lutheranism, and to discussions about Roman Catholic and Anglican viewpoints on apostolic succession.

The statement made by the ecumenical committee is divided into four sections, two of which deal with the New Testament and the doctrine of the ministry in relation to the idea of apostolic succession.

The ministry of the apostles in the New Testament is described by the statement as providing the pattern for the ministry of the Church. On this basis, after the death of the apostles, the pastoral office grew up, involving preaching, administration of the sacraments and the government of the congregation. At this time no particular apostolic inauguration of the office or consecration of the office-bearer was required or considered necessary.

The statement goes on to say that though there are many ministries and modes of service in the Church, this pastoral office is the main one and all others are subordinate to it. The pastoral office is not "a function of the congregation". Those who hold it "confront the congregation as representatives of Christ and the apostles". They are appointed through cooperation of existing office-bearers with the congregation.

There is no need, according to the statement, for such a pastoral office to be a link in an unbroken chain of ministers appointed by the laying on of hands by ordination. The idea of unbroken continuity in this sense must be rejected when it is thought of as "the sole means of transmitting authority to ministers" and the "exclusive method of achieving and preserving Church unity". However, it is recognised that such continuity might be a true token of apostolic succession in the wider sense of the word developed in the report.

There is, says the document, an apostolic succession of the whole Church which consists in serving Christ according to the pattern laid down by the first ministers, the apostles, and in the transmission of such service. The continuity transmitted through the Church's functions of preaching, sacraments, worship and definition of doctrine links together tradition, faith and testimony. It is in this sense that the Church, in accordance with its own creed, is called "apostolic".

Since those who hold pastoral office are in a special sense "successors and representatives of the pastoral office of the apostles", the statement says it is permissible to speak of a succession in the office itself. But to speak in this way does not imply some kind of automatic transmission through the actual laying on of hands; it rather implies subordination to the apostles and commitment to the Church's apostolic tradition.

E.P.S., Geneva

DocumentEvangelical Alliance Defines Attitude Toward WCC

The Evangelical Alliance, a world-wide organisation of Christians drawn from many churches, has issued a statement following discussion on the proposals to integrate the International Missionary Council and the World Council of Churches.

The statement says:

"The Evangelical Alliance has always emphasized that spiritual oneness in Christ already exists among believers and this must not be confused with organisational unity or uniformity. It is, we believe, this 'unity of the spirit' for which our Lord prayed (St. John 17) and which the Apostle bids us keep rather than make (Ephesians 4: 3).

"The Evangelical Alliance believes wholeheartedly in the desirability of Christian cooperation, but considers that unity of action in Church affairs can best be achieved when all the consenting parties are agreed upon an adequate doctrinal foundation.

"The founders of the Alliance sharing this conviction drew up a Basis of Belief in 1846, which includes such fundamental and Protestant doctrines as the Divine Inspiration, Authority and Sufficiency of the Holy Scriptures, the Incarnation of the Son of God, His work of Atonement upon the Cross for the sins of the whole world, and Justification of the sinner by faith alone.

"Secondly, while not wishing to adopt an attitude of hostility, the Alliance regards the World Council with some apprehension for the following reasons:

"The Council of the Evangelical Alliance, as has been pointed out in an earlier statement, views with definite misgivings the inadequacy of the doctrinal statement which characterizes the World Council of Churches. This is further accentuated by the fact that all member churches are left free to interpret this minimum confession in whatever way they will.

"While the World Council of Churches explicitly disavows any intention of becoming a "super-Church", the trends in that direction cannot be entirely disregarded; and while the sincerity of those who speak of "one Church for one world" is appreciated, the Alliance distrusts any unity which is achieved by organisational methods if at the risk of compromising essential Christian doctrine and traditional Protestant freedom.

"In conclusion, the Council of the Evangelical Alliance desires to make the following points:

"The Alliance readily acknowledges the value of certain functions of the World Council of Churches, as, for example, in the field of Inter-Church Aid and Refugee Service, and recognises that in the administrative and consultative sphere a useful contribution has been made.

"The Alliance realises that many conservative evangelicals, through their denominational affiliations, are directly or indirectly linked with the World Council of Churches. In this matter the Alliance believes strongly in the historic Protestant principle of individual freedom of conscience.

"In the light of the present situation, the Alliance feels a new sense of call to bear witness to evangelical and historic Christianity, and to encourage and keep true spiritual unity. With this in mind, it calls upon all churches and societies at home and abroad, as well as individual Christians, who hold

the evangelical faith and accept the Bible as the Word of God, to stand with them both for the defence and propagation of the Gospel."

Commenting on the Evangelical Alliance's apprehension about the Basis of the World Council of Churches, which calls itself "a fellowship of churches which accept our Lord Jesus Christ as God and Saviour", the British Free Church paper "The Christian World" says: "This reads a little curiously when we recollect that Unitarians and other Liberal Christian groups have expressed regret that they seem to be excluded from the World Council of Churches by reason of its too orthodox definition of essential Christianity. We have the fullest possible respect for the specific evangelical witness", the comment goes on, "yet we cannot but deprecate in all friendliness the misgivings expressed by the Alliance. It would be a pity if evangelical support for the ecumenical cause were withheld because of disapproval of a doctrinal statement which is to be regarded as, at most, an article of peace."

E.P.S., Geneva

